

Citizen forum targets south Phoenix crime

Sadie Jo Smokey

The Arizona Republic

February 21, 2008

Sitting on hard, navy-blue benches in a south Phoenix elementary school, about 100 people gathered Tuesday to voice their concerns about graffiti, gang violence and police response times.

They complained police are stretched too thin because of the increasing population.

Some residents said fear of gunfire keeps them locked in their homes and called their neighborhoods were a mini-Iraq.

They expressed anger at Phoenix Mayor Phil Gordon and council members, saying it appears they would rather give financial incentives to developers instead of an overworked, overwhelmed police force.

"We must have the resources and we need them starting now," said Greta Rogers, an Ahwatukee resident.

"Prop. 1 was a Band-Aid on a blister on your butt," she said, referring to the recent voter-approved sales-tax increase to pay for 500 new police personnel and 100 new firefighters.

"We need more than one officer per square mile. We need 5,000 more officers."

Phoenix Police Chief Jack Harris said police would probably never catch up with growth and demand.

Besides budgetary woes, the department can't recruit enough qualified applicants to join the police force fast enough.

"Of course we would always like more," Harris said. "But to defend the mayor and council, they did move up the construction of two new precincts (in north and southwest Phoenix). A lot of the people you approved will go to work in those precincts in 2010."

A group of top local law-enforcement and public officials hosted Tuesday's forum.

State Sen. Leah Landrum Taylor, D-Phoenix; Sen. John Huppenthal, R-Chandler; Reps. Cloves C. Campbell Jr. and Ben Miranda, both D-Phoenix; Phoenix Councilman Michael Nowakowski; and Attorney General Terry Goddard

reminded residents of the power they have by getting involved in their communities. Their goal was to listen to residents' concerns, they said.

"When I was mayor of Phoenix, Laveen was a couple of farms," Goddard said.
"Things are changing. We have a tremendous amount of power collectively
We need to find all the tools that exist."